

FLORIDIANS FOR FAIR AND IMPARTIAL COURTS

# “Fair and Impartial Courts”

## THE CHALLENGE

In 2010, leaders in the Florida House launched an unprecedented attempt to upset the balance of power by splitting the Supreme Court in two and letting the Legislature set court rules.

Concerned that The Florida Bar was not mounting an aggressive defense, a group of former Florida Bar leaders called on Salter>Mitchell to rally opposition and help derail the so-called “court reform.”

## OUR APPROACH

Starting with a loosely organized base of 33 stakeholders who had begun sharing their concerns through a listserv, we worked our relationships with The Florida Bar, the Florida Supreme Court and the State Court Administrator’s Office to quickly establish a diverse coalition of good governance advocates.

Two weeks after the first organizational call – “Floridians for Fair and Impartial Courts” was born. [www.fairandimpartial.com](http://www.fairandimpartial.com) made its debut as reporters from across the state joined a media conference call that heralded vigorous and influential opposition to the legislative power grab. Five former Florida Supreme Court Justices, a former Governor and U.S. Senator, a Florida appellate court judge, a former U.S. District Court



Judge, a Florida Circuit Court Judge, a representative of the American Judicatory Society, a former Florida Bar president and a former president of the American Bar Association joined in sending one clear message: the fairness and impartiality of our court system is non-negotiable.

The campaign launch, followed by daily calls and emails to editors and reporters across Florida produced a constant stream of articles and editorials exposing the tactics being used by legislative leaders to advance what was clearly a “solution in search of a problem.” Lawmakers were bombarded as every major daily Florida newspaper, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and USA Today joined the chorus calling for an end to the assault on the courts. In all, 30 editorials and over 90 news stories were deployed in support of the aggressive grassroots advocacy that were needed to beat back the legislation.

## THE RESULTS

10 Republicans co-sponsored an amendment that killed the plan. Republican opposition also squelched a separate bill expanding political control over judicial appointments. The Democratic caucus voted as a block against all court proposals.

